

Message Text

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PASS TO ASSISTANT SECRETARY ATHERTON FROM SOBER

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S E C R E T NEW DELHI 2057

NOFORN

E.O. 11652: XGDS2, DECLAS 2-12-90

TAGS: IN, PFOR, MASS, MARR, UR

SUBJECT:

WHY IS MARSHAL GRECHKO COMING TO INDIA NOW?

REF: STATE 031541, NEW DELHI IR 6 844 0022 75

1. AFTER FORMER DEFENSE MINISTER JAGJIVAN RAM'S VISIT TO MOSCOW
IN JULY 1973, HE TOLD NEWSMEN IN BEIRUT THAT BREZHNEV AND KOSYGIN
WOULD VISIT INDIA BEFORE THE END OF 1973 AND THAT THEIR VISIT
WOULDBE FOLLOWED BY DEFENSE MINISTER GRECHKO. BREZHNEV CAME

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ALONE AT THE END OF 1973 AND NOBODY FOLLOWED. 1974 WAS A YEAR OF

SENIOR INDIAN MILITARY VISITS TO THE SOVIET UNION--TWO BY THE DEFENSE SECRETARY, TWO BY THE NAVAL CHIEF OF STAFF AND ONE BY THE AIR CHIEF OF STAFF. GRECHKO'S VISIT TO INDIA, 14 MONTHS AFTER BREZHNEV'S, IS IN RESPONSE TO RAM'S 1973 INVITATION AND PRESUMABLY WILL PROVIDE AN OPPORTUNITY TO RESOLVE AT A HIGH LEVEL AT LEAST SOME OF THE OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS IN INDO-SOVIET MILITARY RELATIONS.

2. WHILE THE SOVIETS HAVE CONTINUED TO PROVIDE INDIA WITH MILITARY EQUIPMENT, IN THEIR DISCUSSIONS WITH VISITING INDIAN MILITARY DELEGATIONS IN 1974 THEY APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN INCREASINGLY TOUGH ON BOTH PAYMENTS TERMS AND TYPES OF EQUIPMENT THEY ARE PREPARED TO FURNISH. THE SOVIETS ARE ASKING FOR HARD CURRENCY PAYMENT FOR AT LEAST SOME NEW DEFENSE - ITEMS AND HAVE BEEN NON-COMMITTAL ON THEIR ABILITY TO SUPPLY OTHER ITEMS AT ALL. (THE GOI IS MAINLY INTERESTED IN A NEW FIGHTER-BOMBER, NEW SAM'S, A NEW ANTI-TANK MISSILE, LONG-RANGE MARITIME RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT, AND INDIGENOUS PRODUCTION CAPABILITY FOR THE 130 MM FIELD GUN.)

3. WE HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE GRECHKO'S VISIT WAS TIMED IN ORDER TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF INDIAN CONCERN OVER RECENT US-PAKISTANI DISCUSSIONS OVER ARMS SALES. GRECHKO WAS PROBABLY ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED TO COME LATE IN 1974 AND WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT SLIPPAGE IN TIMING HAD ANY POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE IN TERMS OF THE SOVIETS PREFERRING TO WAIT FOR A TIME WHEN THE INDIAN NEGOTIATING POSITION MIGHT BECOME "SOFTER." NEVERTHELESS THE TIMING OF THE VISIT FOR FEBRUARY 24-28, AFTER BHUTTO'S U.S. VISIT, DOES ENABLE THE INDIAN MILITARY TO ARGUE DOMESTICALLY FOR THE URGENCY OF THE NEED TO STRIKE A NEW AGREEMENT WITH THE SOVIETS ON ARMS SUPPLIES, AND FOR GRECHKO TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF INDIAN CONCERN OVER POSSIBLE PAKISTANI ARMS PROCUREMENT IN HIS OWN NEGOTIATING.

4. GRECHKO MAY WELL SEEK INDIAN AGREEMENT ON CLOSER COOPERATION WITH THE SOVIETS IN MILITARY MATTERS, INCLUDING POSSIBLY MORE FREQUENT WORKING LEVEL VISITS, JOINT NAVAL MANEUVERS, AND NAVAL RECONNAISSANCE INCLUDING FACILITIES FOR SPACE TRACKING AND RECOVERY. THE GOI HAS BEEN RELUCTANT TO AGREE TO THESE IN THE PAST

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AND WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE MRS. GANDHI WILL BE RELUCTANT AT THIS TIME. THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE DEFENSE MINISTER, HAS THUS FAR REACTED WITH CAUTION AND BALANCE TO REPORTS ABOUT POSSIBLE NEW U.S. ARMS SALES TO PAKISTAN. WE DOUBT THAT IT WOULD HOLD TO SUCH A POSTURE WHILE PRIVATELY PREPARING TO MAKE CONCESSIONS TO THE USSR WHICH ONLY A PUBLIC POSTURE OF VERY GREAT ANGER AND CONCERN OVER ARMS TO PAKISTAN WOULD MAKE PLAUSIBLE AND WHICH HAVE BEEN REFUSED IN MORE DISTURBED

TIMES.

5. WE ANTICIPATE THAT GRECHKO IN ANY EVENT IS PREPARED TO AGREE
TO AT LEAST SOME INDIAN REQUESTS; THERE WOULD BE LITTLE POINT
IN HIS COMING IF ALL HE HAD WAS AN EMPTY BASKET. THERE WILL BE
A GRET DEAL OF TALK ABOUT INDO-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP AND PAST SOVIET
ASSISTANCE TO INDIA IN TIME OF NEED. BUT WE SUSPECT MORE ISSUES
MAY BE PUT OVER UNTIL ANOTHER MEETING, AT YET A HIGHER LEVEL,
WHEN MRS. GANDHI GOES TO MOSCOW, PRESUMABLY SOMETIME IN THE NEXT
SIX MONTHS.
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